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THE MISCELLANIST.—No. XVII.

I. ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE.

As we admitted the letter of DEWI into our last Number, it may be expected, that we should now, in reply, offer some defence of a position, which has been rather strenuously maintained in the CAMBRO-BRITON, and particularly in the “Essay on the Antiquity of the Welsh Tongue,” lately inserted*. The position in question, in the words of the Essay, and to which the remarks of our correspondent more immediately apply, is this—that “the hypothesis of an original divine language, complete in all its parts, is not to be defended by any arguments drawn from Scripture or reason.” In answer to this DEWI observes, that “he can no more doubt, that language was, at first, communicated to man by the Almighty, than that the substance of his food and the materials of his raiment were provided for him;” and this language, so communicated, he afterwards describes to be “a perfect speech, sufficient for all the purposes of the first man, adapted to his capacities and situation, to the nature and state of things, to the world in which he lived”—although he had previously characterized it by other terms, which, as we shall presently see, may be regarded as somewhat at variance with those we have just quoted.

Our readers have now before them the whole question in dispute between the writer of the Essay and our correspondent; the former denying the divine origin of language in a systematic form, and the latter, apparently, supporting the affirmative of this hypothesis. We say *apparently*, because there certainly is some contradiction of terms in DEWI’s letter upon this point; since, on one occasion, as above quoted, he speaks of the original language as “a perfect speech,” adapted to the existing state of things, and, on another, treats it as no more than the “elements” or “materials” of speech. Now, if we consider our correspondent’s last-mentioned view of the question, we shall find, that it precisely agrees with that, taken of it by the writer of the Essay, who distinctly states it as his opinion, that “language was, in its infancy, composed of the

* See also vol. i. pp. 41 and 81.

most simple elements, which, although incapable of expressing the various ideas, that subsequently thronged into the human mind, formed the simple yet solid basis, upon which the grand superstructure of human speech, in all its splendid and majestic varieties, was progressively reared." This, surely, differs only in the mode of expression from what DEWI himself says, when he observes, that " man, having received the materials, the simple and primary elements, of speech, as many as were at first necessary, was capable afterwards of increasing these materials by different modifications." As we take it for granted, however, that our correspondent had no intention to admit the justice of the Essayist's conclusion on this point, we shall treat this quotation as a mere *lapsus linguae*, and proceed to examine the other assumption, that " a perfect speech," commensurate with the various necessities of the first man, was the immediate boon of the Deity.

Now, if, as we presume, DEWI here means, by " a perfect speech," one of a systematic character, however circumscribed its vocabulary, we repeat the opinion, expressed in the Essay, that such a speech could not have been divinely communicated, and for this obvious reason—that, in man's primitive state, such a boon must have been totally useless. That the first man was endowed by his Maker with the capacity of forming such a speech out of those elementary principles, that are to be found in the natural articulations of the human voice, we have, on former occasions, admitted *; and we have also assumed, what we here repeat, that this is the only manner, in which language can be said to have been originally the gift of heaven. The " elements" of language, indeed, like the " substance of food," and the " materials of raiment," were, no doubt, of divine origin, inasmuch as they were implanted in man's nature at his creation; but, to assume, that he then received " a perfect speech," is as rational as to assert that the refinements of " food" and " raiment," known afterwards to the world, were supplied to him then. In his simple and unsophisticated state the one must have been quite as necessary as the other: an accomplished language, which is but another term for " a perfect speech," must have been as much wanted by the first man as a high seasoned dish for his palate, or a luxu-

* See the places referred to in the preceding note.

rious covering for his body. To ascribe, therefore, to the Deity the boon under consideration, is to impute to HIM, *qui nil molitur inepté*, a conduct at once unnecessary and unmeaning.

The foregoing remarks, our readers will perceive, are offered on the presumption, that DEWI meant to imply, by "a perfect speech," a language regularly and systematically constructed. If, however, his expression had, reference only to those "primary elements," of which he elsewhere speaks, then there exists no difference of opinion between him and the writer of the Essay, who has merely maintained, that a *complete language* was not divinely communicated to the first man. With respect to the elements of one, the Essay distinctly admits, that they were naturally implanted in him, and, consequently, an emanation from his Creator.

We cannot conclude this reply without noticing the charge of impiety (for such it must virtually be considered), which DEWI seems to have made against two writers quoted in the Essay,—M. de Gebelin and Dr. Priestley,—on account, as it would appear, of their espousal of the opinion, which we have here endeavoured to defend, as if such conduct were, indeed, as DEWI would insinuate, "to divest the Deity of his prerogatives," and to "exalt the creature at the expence of the Creator*." We cannot furnish a more satisfactory answer to this covert accusation than what may be found in the following very just and apposite remarks, extracted from the *Celtic Researches*†; and we hope that, in so doing, we shall not expose the worthy author to our correspondent's animadversion.

"I deprecate," says Mr. Davies, "the imputation of impiety for supposing, that man was not furnished with language at his creation. Would it have been a more stupendous miracle, or greater mercy, to constitute a language for man, than to endow him with requisite powers, and with pre-disposition, to make one for himself?—Had primitive language been of divine origin, man would have been under the sacrilegious ne-

* Although the expressions, here quoted, are applied only to Dr. Priestley, and, we must say, with no very great liberality, they must be taken, from the context, as having reference also to the other writer, with respect to the subject immediately under discussion.

† Page 384.

cessity of mutilating it, or altering it, every day. No language could have accommodated itself, exempted from those changes, to the conditions of society, for which man was designed: something would be superfluous or something deficient. Even the language of the Old Testament contains a multitude of terms in acceptations, which Adam, during the first years of his life, could not possibly have understood. How, then, could he have preserved their meaning?"

II. ANSWERS TO THE " QUESTIONS ON THE WELSH LAWS *."

1. THE Welsh acre was less than the English: it comprised 2822 square yards. In the Welsh Laws the acre is called *erw*; but the term, most frequently used, is *cyvar*.

2. There is no reason for believing, that the divisions of *Can-trev*, *Cwmwd*, &c. prevailed throughout England before its subjugation by the Saxons. The contrary, indeed, is more than probable; for it is well known, that the Romans, during their occupation of the island, introduced their own territorial divisions; and the state of warfare and anarchy, that intervened between the fall of the Roman power and the final success of the Saxons, could hardly have been propitious to the establishment of any extensive political regulations.

3. *Arglwydd* seems to have been used in the Welsh laws for the Lord of the Manor or feudal proprietor, without any reference to the rights of primogeniture. The word has, at present, merely a general signification.

4. There is no instance, of which we are aware, of any national council, composed of the *Natu Maximi*, formerly prevailing in Wales, similar to the English House of Lords.

5. The *Pencenedl*, or Head of the Tribe, seems to have resembled the Chief of the Clan in Scotland. Anciently the whole community was, in Wales, divided into families; and each family had its *Pencenedl*, to whom every member of it, as far as the ninth degree of consanguinity, was politically attached. The duties of a *Pencenedl*, therefore, must have been the general patronage and protection of his Tribe; and he also assisted at certain national councils. See Arch. of Wales, vol. iii. pp. 290 and 307.

* See the last Number, p. 180.